The Contradictions of Diaspora: a reflexive critique of the Jewish Diaspora's relationship with Israel

> Marie was in fact the best Jew in the family, far more observant than her husband or his parents. She pinned a doily on her hair on Friday nights to light the candles, and baked three-cornered cookies when it was annually appropriate, and knew all the words, in Hebrew, to the national anthem of Israel.
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> Michael Chabon, *The Wonder Boys* (1995: 173)

Introduction

What does Israel provide ideationally for Diaspora Jews that serves as the basis for Diaspora/Israel relations and justifies the importance of Israel for Jewish identity? This is a question that is rarely asked and instead assumed, but it needs to be asked. At its core, this question raises the aporetic character of the significance of Israel for Diaspora Jewry. For many Jews, Israel matters to them greatly, but it equally provides challenges the undermine its normative value because of its potential for divisiveness that in large part flows from critiques about Israel. In the following I explore this question and the aporia by taking a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach. Doing so is unique in the contemporary literature about Jews and Israel, and provides a methodological avenue to reveal key features of the Diaspora/Israel relationship, including how the role of Israel's *meaning* functions.

I grew up in the West Coast of Canada. As my rabbi once said, it was hard to get more Diaspora than were we lived. Yet our geographical distance from the Middle East did not mean that Israel was far away. It was closer than you might think. On nearby Gabriola Island there is a Labour-Zionist summer camp modeled on the Kibbutz (or at least, it was when I went there as a teenager) the is part of the Habonim Dror movement. At the local Synagogue, there were flags of both Israel and Canada prominently on display, and we said prayers for both. When Israel was attacked, as it was during the Gulf War, we all felt it. That war was brought close to home as I heard about how gas masks were delivered to relatives in Israel, and how my grandfather had to tape up windows in his home. Debating Israeli security, especially during the Intifada, was a common discussion point in the small community. When Israel was under threat, we felt it vicariously.

We hoped for a secure Israel, but we believed in a just one. At camp I learned about social justice as well as Zionism. And the rabbi when I was young fought for social justice. He still devotes

efforts to Jewish-Muslim relations (Wangnsnes 2017). With a socially progressive rabbi and a background in a social-justice-Labour-Zionist ideology, my vision of Israel was rose-tinted. I even used to wear an Israeli army beret (it just seemed appropriate), and was embarrassed when I met a Palestinian my age who asked me remove it. I didn't understand why. He was the better person for not taking anything out on me.

There was tension about Israel, since even at camp we knew that not everything Israel did was right. But suicide bombings and the Gulf War all contributed to a sense of a country under siege. Yet, there was little reflexive analysis about the role of Israel in our lives as Diaspora Jews, and of our subsequent normative commitments to this country. Debate tended to take fairly standard positions: Doves versus Hawks, Human Rights versus Security. This spectrum was – is – certainly not dichotomous, but it might as well be. What we did not, indeed could not, consider was that Israel was becoming an intellectual aporia, an irresolvable contradiction. On the one hand, Israel really mattered for Jewish identity and Jewish connectivity. But, on the other, Israel also more often than not failed to live up to the ideal of what we needed it to be.

Over the years, unpacking the Jewish Diaspora's relationship with Israel became increasingly important to me as I tried to work through this spectrum and make sense out of the aporia. In recent years, a few books have been published specifically on the politics of how Israel features in Diaspora Jewish life (Kahn-Harris, 2014; Baron 2015; Waxman 2016). But this literature is an outlier and most work on Israel and the Diaspora assumes an answer to a question that is not asked: What does Israel provide ideationally for Diaspora Jews that serves as the basis for Diaspora/Israel relations and justifies the importance of Israel for Jewish identity?

Much of the literature that does exist on this topic concerns changing levels of support among Diaspora Jewry, primarily focusing on American Jewry. The significance of this issue was great enough that in 2010, *Contemporary Jewry* devoted an entire issue (Vol. 30, No. 2/3) addressing the question whether, "American Jews increasingly are socially, culturally, ethnically, and emotionally, distant from the State of Israel" (Heilman 2010, 141). This special issue focused on the differences between the Cohen and Kelman (2010, 287; 2007) hypothesis that non-orthodox American Jews are "growing more distant from Israel", and that of Theodore Sasson, Charles Kadushin and Leonard Saxe (2010), who argued instead that the distancing varies by lifecourse: as Jews age they become more attached to Israel. Sasson, et. al have been prolific on this topic (Sasson, 2010; Sasson, Phillips, Wright, Kadushin, & Saxe, 2012; Sasson, Shain, Hecht, Wright, & Saxe, 2014). At the time, this topic took on added political significance when Peter Beinart (2010) referenced the Cohen and Kelman hypothesis in his

influential work about Jews, Israel and Zionism. However, this debate and the subsequent literature continues not to address the underlying character of Diaspora Jews' relationship with Israel. Instead it presumes that such a relationship can exit without requiring an explanation.

In 2010, at least, the focus was about how to interpret the data underpinning these different distancing hypotheses, as the data all pointed to a decline in non-orthodox young (American) Jews distancing themselves from Israel. As Ephraim Tabory (2010) noted in his contribution, the debate did not address why the question of "distancing" is so important, nor what exactly distancing means. Similarly, others questioned what precisely the debate was about, how the data was interpreted, its strengths and weaknesses.

Gordon Fellman was one of the contributors who did question an underlying normative assumption. As he wrote, "What I find especially fascinating about the dispute is the unexamined assumption that there is something good about American Jews feeling connected with Israel" (Fellman 2010, 248). But in the next sentence he dismissed this assumption's questionability: "I see nothing the matter with that being a fundamental assumption… but why not acknowledge it as such and examine it in some complex way?" Bethamie Horowitz (2010, 245), however, suggested that we should not take such claims for granted and instead we should take seriously the wider range of reactions that American Jews have toward Israel, investigating these various "narratives". Tabory offered a potential response to Horowtiz when, in his contribution, he wrote that Israel is part of a "cultural tool-box of Jewish identity" (Tabory 2010, 195). Yet, his list of tools (ethnic and social capital) is general and ignores the significance of the toolbox in which they are located and make sense. Moreover, the key assumption identified by Fellman remained largely unexamined.

This debate, one of the more significant about Diaspora Jews' relationship with Israel, is characterized by two obvious lacunae. First, that it is unproblematic to assume the relationship, and second that it is not necessary to explore the greater contexts in which this relationship can be understood to be of significance for Jewish identity. These are big topics of concern for Jewish communities in multiple countries (although the bulk of the evidence used in what follows is from North America and the U.K.), and for academic debates about boycotting Israel, as these debates often involve at some point addressing Jews' relationships with Israel.

Consequently, the following argues that the relationship between Diaspora Jews and Israel is best understood phenomenologically, but that this raises new questions that further complicate the normative aporia characterising Diaspora/Israel relations. This first section functions as a literature review and suggests that the significance of Israel for Diaspora Jews is based on a type of obligation

that is political. What this obligation means, and why it matters, is the focus of the second section. The importance of highlighting obligation is because it provides a normative structure that reveals the type of meaning Israel offers. Following Tabory, it is this meaning that serves as a type of "tool". In the third section I suggest that this meaning is one of authority, and the meaning it provides serves as part of the phenomenological structure characterizing Jewish being-in-the-world in the age of Israel. This section also includes a reflexive discussion, following on the opening paragraphs of this introduction, that represents both the personal nature of this topic, but also seeks to provide further insight into some of the issues that frame debate about Jews and Israel. Methodologically, the argument that follows is heavily influenced by my own experience and my own critical reflections on these experiences. However, the work is also influenced by my own empirical research on the topic, which included over forty interviews in Canada, the USA, the U.K. and Israel [Baron 2015]. Some of the empirical claims made in this paper reflect this kind of inter- or cross-textual encounters whereby my narratives and those of the interviewees intermix. Indeed, many of the interviews were fruitful specifically because of being able to off each other's experiences and narratives. However, as this empirical evidence is already published, the purpose of this article is not to repeat those findings but to expand theoretically upon them. As such, in the fourth and final section, I develop this phenomenological argument by focusing on the role of critique. Critique serves as an activity that reveals the normative character of Israel's meaningful authority. What follows could provide a theoretical approach to studying other diaspora populations, however, in this paper the focus is on the Jewish Diaspora, specifically in Canada, the UK and the United States.

The Existing Toolbox

Toolboxes are important, not only because of what they store but because they contribute to providing the meaningful structure in which to understand their contents. This, at least, is one of the lessons from the hermeneutic phenomenology of Martin Heidegger 1999 [1962]). Hence, Tabory's reference to Israel being part of the Jewish-identity toolbox is a fairly empty comment without also examining the toolbox itself and the metaphorical room or space in which the toolbox and its tools reside. Indeed, Horowitz's (2010) remark about narratives can be re-interpreted as an invitation to examine how we understand these tools, with a focus on the meaning that Israel provides and which enables it to serve a role where distancing from or being connected to Israel as a Jew carries normative inferences.

Research on the character of the Diaspora/Israel relationship provides one indication of how to address these issues, which is that contrary to Fellman (2010), it is not especially clear how to understand the normative feature of American Jews' relationship with Israel. Not only that, the character of Diaspora/Israel ties is itself a sensitive subject, especially when it conflates Jewish identity with ideological convictions about Israel. Furthermore, tied up within a wide range of literature about Jews and Israel (Dinur, 1969; Avishai, 1985; Eizenstat, 1990-1991; Beilin, 2000; Hazony, 2001; Judt, 2003; Ben-Moshe and Segev, 2007; Dershowitz, 2008; Gorenberg, 2011; Butler, 2012; Eizenstat, 2012; Kahn-Harris, 2014) is the conflation of a set of different normative claims pertaining to Jews having a responsibility, duty or obligation to support Israel, that Jews ought to be loyal to the Jewish State, or that Jews ought to have a positive relationship with the Jewish State. What this conflation suggests is that it is not clear what the normative context of this relationship is, nor the wider ontological context in which to understand the relationship.

In *Israel, Diaspora and the Routes of National Belonging*, Jasmin Habib (2004: 25) writes that although the Jewish Diaspora does not "live within the geographic borders of Israel, the narratives of the nation-state have become their narratives of belonging as a nation (as Jews). This form of diaspora nationalism is based on a sense of obligation and responsibility to preserve the collective, in memory, tradition, and practice." The choice of the words obligation and responsibility is telling. Both are used to provide an explanatory reference for the suggested account of diaspora nationalism and there is the implication that responsibility follows from having an obligation. Yet, it is not clear what type of obligation she is referring to. It cannot be a political obligation, at least not in how that term is used in political theory. Diaspora Jews do not obey the state of Israel, and are not subject to its laws unless they plan on moving there (one possible exception is on life events relating to marriage, divorce and conversion, as the orthodoxy controls these in Israel, but that is a different topic). Yet, the obligation is political because of its transnational character (Baron 2015), and it is animated by the politics of belonging. However, these are fairly broad statements.

Multi-ethnic communities present empirical grounds for rethinking the politics of belonging (Bader 1997), but there is little about how obligation functions among a diaspora people. It used to be common to think not of obligation but loyalty, as in "dual loyalty" (Baron, 2009b). For example, in his introduction to the 1986 edited volume about diasporas and international relations, Gabriel Sheffer (1986: 20) writes that, "The likelihood of contradiction arising between a state's policies and the predilections of a homeland dwelling people will obviously depend in large part on the degree to

which the state apparatus identifies itself exclusively with the interests of that people."[1] Indeed, it is precisely on this issue that he highlights the need for theoretical enquiry: "The third theoretical focus [in this book] is on the conditions in host countries conducive to the maintenance of diaspora solidarities and loyalties as well as the conditions in homelands likely to trigger or muffle their expression" (Sheffer, 1986: 12). To think in terms of loyalty is to hold on to the idea that, for Diaspora Jews at least, there is an implied claim for Jews to support Israel, and the deeply problematic counter that Jews in the Diaspora can be disloyal to Israel. In this context, obligation, loyalty and support become confused, as they are all tied to the same underlying empirical phenomenon of Diaspora Jews being bound up with Israel in some way.

Note for example, Stephen J. Whitfield's (2002: 414) comment about Israel becoming the "*sine qua non* of [American] Jewish communal affairs and leadership, so that an agnostic or even an atheist became more acceptable as an attribute of, say, a synagogue president than an anti-Zionist," or David Vital's (1990: 89) classic *The Future of the Jews* where he suggests there may be an obligation between Jews and Israel due to their loyalty to the Jewish state. Sheffer (2012) has also addressed this relation in his work on loyalty and the Jewish Diaspora. In addition, Judith Butler (2012: 3) hones in on obligation when she writes about her surprise that people assume that being religiously Jewish means being a Zionist. Yet there is nothing really surprising about such a correlation (Baron, 2016: 184).

The link between Jewish identity and support for Israel is not new, and in the United States has been part of a long-standing effort on the part of the Jewish leadership. Historically, for political Zionists like Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir, it made no sense to be a Zionist in North America. To be a Zionist meant to move to and live in Israel, and anything less than that was nonsense or "pseudo-Zionism" (Eisen, 1986: 118-119). However, American Jewry, like most Jews (Grodzinsky, 2004) were not keen to uproot and move to Palestine. Consequently, American Jews came to view their support for Israel as a sign of their being good Jews. Mordecai Kaplan (1881-1983), Solomon Schechter (1847-1915), and Louis Brandeis (1856-1941) were all active in advancing different arguments that sought to make this link. As Arnold Eisen notes (1986: 157), Brandeis was quite explicit in linking Jewish identity with Zionism, taking a step further to also argue that being a Zionist was to be a good American:

[1] More recent work in IR by Yossi Shain has located diaspora politics within a constructivist framework (Shain, 1994-1995; Shain and Bristman, 2002; Shain and Barth, 2003; Shain, 2007). For a critique of this approach see Baron (2014). See also Vertovec (2009) for a useful introduction to transnationalism.

"Loyalty to America demands… that each American Jew become a Zionist." There is also a history of Jewish critics of Zionism, but the point for now is to highlight how Diaspora Jewish identity became associated with Zionism.

Despite the linkage between Jewish identity and Zionism, it has become fairly uncommon to find loyalty as the concept framing Jewish Diaspora/Israel relations. Instead, the main issues today are divisiveness and Israel's function as a resource for Jewish identity and Jewish peoplehood. In this regard, one of the more important books about the (American) Diaspora's relationship with Israel also reveals the extent of the theoretical limitations framing contemporary research about Diaspora/Israel relations. Dov Waxman's *Trouble in the Tribe* focuses on the confrontation and conflict within the American Jewish community in its relationship with Israel. Waxman, however, vacillates. He repeatedly stresses that Israel is not the most important issue for Jews, but he also repeatedly emphasizes how serious and how divisive Israel has become. Similarly, he repeatedly either claims or implies that Israel is polarizing American Jewish communities but then backtracks in the conclusion by saying that it is not polarized, but "only that it is becoming polarized" (Waxman 2016, 195), only to then, a few pages later, write that, "In some Jewish communities, this debate has become so nasty that a moratorium on talking about Israel has effectively been put into place" (Waxman 2016, 211-212). That sounds very polarized. But why the polarization?

Waxman suggests it has something to do with the public nature of debate, which he attributes largely to the Internet. But he offers no theoretical explanation for why we should understand Information Communication Technology (ICT) in this way. The polarization is a normative issue, not simply an empirical one, and as such, if ICT is to play this role there needs to an argument for how such technology contributes to normative results. This is precisely part of what Habermas (1992 [1972]) sought to explore in his landmark work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Instead, in attempting to explain why the polarization matters for Jewish identity, Waxman suggests that the reason has to do with changes in American Jewry. This argument is not especially surprising. Demographic changes often accompany political and social changes. Moreover, nowhere in the book is there an argument why, for American Jews (or any other Jews, he is British, as he acknowledges in the book) Israel *should* be such a controversial topic and why Jews *should* even care about (1) Israel or (2) its seemingly controversial character. The emphasis on should is not because Israel ought to be controversial, but rather because it so often is. The importance of Israel and of debate about Israel are framed by Waxman in terms that actually say very little about Jewish identity. In the opening pages of the book he writes that such debate "threatens to divide the American Jewish community, weaken

American Jewish support for Israel, and impact U.S. Government policy toward Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict" (Waxman, 2016, 2). In other words, Israel matters not because of its importance for Jewish identity, but for wider national and geo-political reasons.

Despite the range of approaches in the existing literature, there is little clarity about what exactly is being addressed, other than that there is something of interest here and which can be characterized as a set of issues pertaining to loyalty, obligation, allegiance, responsibility, distance, crisis, polarization, and diaspora nationalism (or some equivalent). What they all share, however, is that somehow Israel means something, or rather, that it can mean something important for Jewish identity, and as a consequence of this meaning there are normative arguments for why Israel ought to matter. This brings us back to Heidegger's hermeneutic-phenomenology, and the idea that there are ontological features of the world that we engage with and which provide meaning that help us function in the world. In this sense, the question becomes what is the phenomenological role that Israel serves in the provision of meaning for Diaspora Jewry?

Isaiah Berlin (1975) argued that the role Israel serves is one of choice:

> Today, individual Jews have this choice. They can be passionate supporters of the State of Israel or they can ignore it. They can contribute to it, can live there, can visit it constantly, can regard themselves as its emissaries abroad. They can have any relationship they wish with it which is desirable in a free, open-textured liberal society. This was not open to them before. And this is the achievement.

He is correct in emphasizing the significance of this choice, but in this account its significance emerges because of its novelty (the first and only sovereign Jewish nation-state). Rather, as I will now argue, the relationship is one about authority and meaning. Israel functions in this way because of the character or form of obligation that exists between Diaspora Jews and Israel. The obligation is, following Berlin, a choice. However, contra Berlin, the choice is not what is significant. Rather, the obligation functions as a consequence of belonging and of the experiences of either belonging or being presumed to belong, and of how Israel is able to offer a particular type of authentically grounded meaning for the Jewish people in the Diaspora (Abramson 2017). The obligation is not toward any particular state as such, but for those that feel it, is produced and experienced as part of how contemporary Diaspora Jewish identity is constructed (Baron, 2015). In other words, the obligation is phenomenologically constituted.

Identity and Obligation

The type of obligation characterizing Diaspora/Israel relations is significantly different from the traditional account in political theory (Horton, 2010). The Jewish Diaspora's "obligations" in regard to Israel have a reflexive[2] character in how the obligations stem from negotiations over identity and belonging, and in how Israel can be understood to provide authority as a source of meaning for the Jewish people.

For the Jewish Diaspora, Israeli politics are experienced in a way that the majority of IR scholarship cannot appreciate because of how Israel matters in the construction of contemporary Diaspora Jewish identity.[3] To refer to obligation, loyalty or support of Israel by Diaspora Jews is to make a reference to the closeness that exists between Israel and the construction of contemporary Diaspora Jewish identity (Baron 2015). It is also to highlight the significance of the "every-day" sociological and anthropological experiences of international politics, and a turn to a more phenomenological approach to thinking and doing IR. It is to focus on the micro politics of the international (Solomon and Steele 2017). In this context, it becomes additionally important not to claim that feeling a connection with Israel is a sufficient condition for being Jewish, or even that it is important for all Jews (Karpf et al., 2008). Our encounters with Israel, ideationally, emotionally, politically, and so on, all matter for the ways (or senses) through which Jewish identity is constructed, understood and experienced, and there is a plurality of such experiences (Baron 2015). That most Jewish population surveys about the contemporary sociology of Jewish communities contain questions about Israel is telling. Of particular relevance here are the surveys by PEW (2013) in the United States and the JPR (Graham and Boyd, 2010) in the UK. Leading Jewish organizations, such as the Board of Deputies in the UK, the American Jewish Committee, or the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs in Canada, all provide additional evidence for the importance of Israel for contemporary Jewish sociology in their many public statements emphasizing Jewish connectivity with Israel.

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[2] On reflexivity see, Neufeld, 1993; Dauphinee, 2013; Guzzini, 2013; Hamati-Ataya, 2013; Löwenheim, 2014; Amoureux and Steele, 2016.

[3] Some literature in IR that does address the politics of transnational or diasporic attachments includes Soguk's (2008) exploration of diaspora politics as one of an urgent relationality, Shain and Barth's (2003) article on diasporas and IR theory, Hockenos's (2003) work about "exile patriotism," Varadarajan's (2010) exploration of the role of diasporas in global politics, and Balibar (2003) on transnational citizenship. See also, Agnew (1994) on IR and territory and Clifford's (1994) work on diasporas.

Consequently, and returning to Habib, when she uses the term obligation she is also suggesting something else, perhaps unintentionally. In political theory, to refer to a political obligation is to refer to a specific connection that binds individuals to their state. This specific connection is referred to as the "particularity principle", a term coined by A.J. Simmons (1980). Simmons suggests that political obligation refers specifically to those moral bonds that bind one in a special way to her or his government, and this is what he describes as the particularity principle. For Diaspora Jews, there can be a moral bond that binds them to Israel, but if such a bond does exist, it does so as a kind of curious communitarian form of commitment. A government and a state are involved — and the state, if not the government, does provide the normative framings of communitarian accounts of belonging — but the state is not the one lived in and there is no clear moral bond to this government. Instead, if there is a connection, it is to the Jewish State *because* of how self-identification as a Jew incorporates personal views about the Zionist project. Indeed, it is this incorporation of the role of Israel for Jewish identity that underpins many of the claims, such as Fellman's (2010), about what it is that is acceptable to assume.

The obligation may not be "political" in Simmon's or Horton's definition, but there is a powerful political characteristic that often does invoke a kind of obligation manifested in the normative positions taken vis-à-vis Israel. What is important here is that the choice is one that, as noted by Berlin, Jews self-consciously make, but it is also often an emotional choice made as part of a dialogue about Jewish peoplehood (Baron 2015). The relationship with Israel is characterized as a conspicuous part of Jewish being-in-the-world.

Most of the time this relationship functions transparently. The conspicuousness is best understood not as a choice that necessarily involves a particular political stance. Consequently, it is for this reason that we (as Jews) are often suspicious when others assume what our individual or collective Jewish values are just because we feel an attachment to Israel. I write this both personally, as when debate about Israel arises it is hard not to feel the pull of guardianship, even if the pull is an uncomfortable one, but also more generally as the role of defending Israel is regularly raised in Jewish communities. The choice is not about Israeli policy per se, but about belonging to an admittedly vague notion of peoplehood in which Israel serves as a unifying factor (Abraham 2016; Kelner 2010), and of the expected normative obligations that this membership entails.

In addition, it also suggests something parochial about Diaspora connectivity to Israel in a sense that it is decidedly particularistic, but done so from a position where such communitarian particularism is also a threat — this is what makes it curious. So long as Israel is privileged in the

Jewish imagination and the government of the State of Israel provided with support, a support that crucially is not grounded on any legal relationship but on a moral one, it is easy to support a nationalist communitarianism that for Jews in the Diaspora could be threatening. Another way to say this is that the Diaspora exists as a challenge to homogeneous nationalist politics. To support such a nationalism in Israel is to undermine the political values necessary for the Diaspora to exist and flourish. To embellish the point, uncritical support of Israel involves accepting the terms of a nationalist political community that if accepted in the countries where Diaspora Jews live, would pose a threat to their integration into those countries. This point has not been lost on Jewish scholars, particularly Simon Rawidowicz (1986).[4] As the philosophy professor Omri Boehm (2016) wrote in an op-ed in the *New York Times,* certain manifestations of Jewish-Zionist support of Israel have even enabled a connection between the alt-right in the United States, and its racist ideology, with Zionist Jews.

Meaning and Authority

What is the moral character that frames any obligation on the part of Diaspora Jews toward Israel? It is not so much a specific moral character but rather a more general normative one, and that the normativity emerges out of how Israel offers a kind of meaningful foundation, what I will refer to as authority, for identity.

For many Diaspora Jews, the character of the State of Israel is exceptional because it is the (only) state where Jews constitute a majority and where Jewish cultural norms and Judaism provide the rhythms of the calendar and frame life. Israel features in the construction of contemporary Diaspora Jewish identity in a special way. This is not to say that Jewish identity requires Israel — far from it — but rather for those who want it, Israel provides a form of authority that can be mobilized in support of particular understandings of Jewish identity. The authority here is not about obedience but about authorship, of having an authoritative character that mobilizes certain meanings to serve as foundational claims for action or belief.

The significance of Israel lies is in how it offers meaning in a world where traditional meanings are hard to come by. Israel provides a historical link to a kind of authority that many have commented as being absent in the modern, post-modern, world. This story of a world without meaning can be traced back to Nietzsche's foundation-breaking remark about the death of God. His argument served

[4] See also, Myers (2008) and Pianko (2010).

as an inspiration for 20th Century theorists who have described this condition as post-modern (Jameson, 1991) or liquid (Bauman, 2000). Stéphane Dufoix (2003: 98) provides a list of related nomenclature including "second modernity" (Ulrich Beck), "supermodernity" (Georges Balandier and Marc Augé), "late modernity" (Anthony Giddens) and "hyper-modernity (Gilles Lipovetsky), all referring to a period in which the 19th Century forms of communication and transportation were drastically changed in such a way that the meanings of space and time changed. What such descriptions share is a claim about a transformation of the social world into one in which "individuals are separated from a grounding in traditional narratives and value systems and must work to ground themselves" (Kern, 2004: 358). Israel can serve as a way to provide Jews (and evangelical Christians, but that is another story) with such a meaningful grounding, and it is this grounding that offers authority.

Hannah Arendt offers a similar take on this reading of the absence of grounding in the contemporary socio-political condition. Israel, a relic of 19th Century political thought about nation, territory and state, built in the 20th Century and trying to find a place in the 21st Century, provides the opportunity to connect to the Jewish tradition and thus find authority in a world that, as Arendt argues, is otherwise without authority. As she explains (Arendt, 2006) authority as a political concept is Roman, and was tied to tradition and to founding or authorship. This is the "sacredness of foundations, in the sense that once something has been founded it remains binding for all future generations" (Arendt, 2006: 120). With the State of Israel, Diaspora Jewry can find exactly the type of authority that Arendt defines as being political because it is tied to tradition and founding (of the Jewish people no less) and remains true for subsequent generations. Not only can the founding of the Jewish people, of monotheism, and *Torah* (although, and significantly, not *Talmud*) all be traced back in some form to the land of Israel on which the State of Israel is built, but the authoring, founding, building and development of the modern State of Israel were also all done by Jews. Israel offers Diaspora Jews a physical geographic presence supported by archeological evidence. This physicality matters. Moreover, here is something other than Hollywood and Sandy Koufax for Jews to take public pride in. All of these background features – authorship, pride, founding, origins – serve to give the idea of the State of Israel those features of authority that compel and provide Israel with meaning that Jews everywhere can turn to. A major indication of this turning has been how the word *Israel* is no longer associated with the people of Israel, but with the State of Israel.

This Zionist reading of Jewish history and identity identifies Israel as the source that overcame the historical experiences of Jewish victimhood. Indeed, it was in response to the 6-Day War and the sense of hopelessness should Israel lose that war, and thus the significance of an Israeli victory, that

transformed Raymond Aron into a supporter of Israel (Aron, 1989: 39). Another factor — one I will return to later — is how Israel offers the ability for Jews to see themselves as agents of change and in charge of their own political destiny in international politics. In these readings of Israel's importance, and there are others, there is a shared denominator. Israel offers Jews something that (ostensibly) cannot be found anywhere else.

What does it offer? What makes Israel so special? Pro-Israel texts tend to rely on ideology to make the case, buying into various political Zionist accounts of the necessity for the Jews to claim their own sovereign state in a world characterized by anti-Semitism. At least since the Six Day War, if not earlier, Israel provided a new source of pride for the Jewish people. This narrative is a response to the view that there are few specifically Jewish political achievements to take pride in. The major Jewish contributions to society were not political but religious, specifically, monotheism (Cahill, 2010). Other offerings could perhaps include the entertainment industry of Hollywood (Gabler, 1998) and other cultural contributions, such as comic books and Superman (Kaplan, 2008). Michael Chabon's (2000) Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* is partly built around the story of Jews and comic books. But political sources of pride were few and far between. Israel, in this narrative, filled this void. Its achievements providing grounds for a vicariously experienced pride, as evident in the widely available tourist paraphernalia marking Israel's military strength, the abundance of reporting in Jewish news sources about everything Gal Godot, especially since her turn as Wonder Woman, the underlying normative narrative of Israel as a "start-up" nation (Senor and Singer 2009), and the identity-building narratives in Taglit-Birthright trips (Abramson 2017; Kelner 2010) particularly the importance of the Massada myth and the lesson of not backing down (Baron, 2009a), among other examples. This narrative is found in Zionist thought that bought into the view of Jews not having found success in the Diaspora, and remnants of it remain in Jewish pulp fiction (Breines 1990). The idea of Israel serving a source or Jewish pride because of its achievements was something I recall learning at camp, and also came up in interviews (Baron 2015).

In addition, Israel is the only country in the world where the rhythms of life are prescribed by the Jewish calendar, and where the spoken language is Hebrew. Moreover, the archeological and biblical history of the land offers Jews something that cannot be found elsewhere. As a consequence, Israel provides an exceptionally significant place in the construction of Jewish peoplehood. What is peculiar in all this is the view that privileges sovereignty when most of the Jewish experience was always diasporic and thus expects a collective forgetting of the diasporic condition of what used to be called the people of Israel (Rawidowicz, 1986). What is all the more peculiar is how this privileging of

sovereign power became so important for Jews who have no intention of packing their bags and moving to Israel.[5]

However, tensions emerge because the authority that can be found does not by itself justify the political project of modern sovereignty and the subsequent militaristic security policies adopted by the Israeli state. Political, and especially revisionist Zionist thought sought to make this connection between a Jewish religious past and a political future. The way that the Massada myth functions as an example of Jewish political self-sacrifice is a paradigmatic example. In unpacking the type of meaning Israel offers, these tensions inevitably surface.

In modern Hebrew, Israel is usually referred to by the term "*Ha'Aretz*", the land. Israel represents not just the return of Jews to their biblical land, but is the only place in the world where Jews can, ostensibly, take charge as a consequence of their auto-emaciation. Lior Zalztman (2015) writes in the New York based Jewish periodical the *Forward*, "It's not that I believe that Zionism absolutely has to be a part of Judaism. But in my world, the two things can't be divorced. My entire Jewish identity is deeply entangled in the Jewish state. I'm afraid that any attempt to separate the two would leave me hollow and confused". These kinds of statements are common and reveal the phenomenological character of Israel, one that pulls in different directions.

In 1996, I went to Israel for a year. This was my second trip to Israel with Habonim. The first one was a summer-travel-the-country-extravaganza. This yearlong trip, less ideologically indoctrinating in its intensity, was called Workshop and was supposed to be an extension of the Labour Zionist experience in its preparation for becoming Habonim camp counsellors. As part of my ongoing research into Diaspora Jews and Israel I have held multiple conversations with friends from camp, from Habonim more generally, and from that trip. I had one of these conversations recently, over email, with Ethan (he has given approval to quote this correspondence), who I have known for over twenty years. Ethan represents a side of the progressive Diaspora constituency that cares about Israel but is not tied to Israel because of family (whereas I am). Ethan and I first met in 1996 on Workshop. After a conversation about why Diaspora Jews should care about Israel, Ethan (J., 2015) wrote back,

[5] I do not address the religious and spiritual dimension here, but it is worth pointing out that Israel has the potential, in a combination of both spiritual and political Zionist terms, to displace both Torah and God as a foundational factor for Jewish identity, and it seems to be able to do so while incorporating both because of how Israel is also the biblical land of the Jews. It is easy to see how this displacement is possible. Judaism started in the Holy Land (although there is a major caveat in the Babylonian Talmud), and modern-day Israel is the first and only nation-state of the Jews in modernity.

and so happened to offer a useful summary of many of the findings from other interviews (Baron 2015)**:**

> For me at least, I have zero family in Israel, and few relatives who have even visited. I live a very comfortable existence in America, as have four generations-worth of ancestry. I can see no aspects of my society capable of aligning to destroy me and my people in the ways that happened in Europe on multiple occasions. In short, I believe that this is the best place in the world to be a Jew, bar none. On the other hand, I've never liked the Jewish identity that's on offer here. I never liked being pegged with the neurotic Woody Allen know-it-alls. I've always wanted to be something more than a Nice Jewish Boy. One of the most profound divides that have occurred in my "Jewish Consciousness" has been that between the Yiddish Jew and the Hebrew Jew. Yiddish is all about nervous humour, and some hidden lexicon reserved for conspiracy. Hebrew is proud, pragmatic, and unapologetic. Going to Israel I realized that I was presented with a choice between the two, and in many ways, the latter is more attractive. That "Hebrewness" is the unique draw of Israel that cannot be replicated in the Diaspora. Israel is powerful in the ways that it provides emotional compensation to the pale, meek, bullied kid. And yet I struggle with comparing the value of my own personal "emotional compensation" against the original sin of Israel's founding.

It is noteworthy that both of us struggle with the same problem: that Israel's violence undermines the emotional connection we feel and threatens any rational justification for our Zionism. Unlike Ethan, I do not have same attraction to "Hebrewness". In my case, it is not "Hebrewness" that is a draw – I used to have Israeli citizenship – but rather my skills with the Hebrew language that frustrate me. Yet in a sense the normative issue is the same. I wish I was fluent in Hebrew, a language that matters largely for me in identity-based terms. Hebrew provides a sense of strength through connectivity to the modern language of the Jews as a non-hyphenated people. Ethan at one point in his life at least, found strength in the idea of the powerful Hebrew that Israel offers, whereas I seek strength of identity through language (with limited success). In both cases, it is a phenomenological aspect of our being and of who we are and want ourselves to be that provides the reference point for the significance of Israel.

It is also of interest that the idea of the new Jew, the strong Hebrew that Ethan refers to, plays in the wider imagination of what Israel provides: a sense of strength and a counter to a non-physical view of Jewish identity, a view immortalized in popular culture by a scene in the 1980s comedy classic,

Airplane, where a passenger on the plane is given an absurdly short pamphlet to read about Jewish sports heroes, the joke being that there are so few of them only a single page pamphlet is necessary.[6] The idea of the strong Hebrew was always part of Zionist mythology, but was glorified by Max Nordau, a student of phrenology, who came up with the idea of the Muscle-Jew, a new breed of Jew that Zionism would create. That cultural resonances of this racial ideal-type continued to exist in Jewish popular culture in second half of the 20th Century is further evidence of how powerful this idea was. Paul Breines (1990) has written a full-length book exploring the appearances of this ideal type in Jewish pulp fiction, renaming the Muscle-Jew "Rambowitz".

But more than bad humour or pulp fiction, Israel provides a source for how to understand a modern Jewish identity. This was the lesson of the Zionists. It was the call not just of Pinsker but of other Zionists who argued that the development of the State of Israel would usher in a new Jew, one with confidence, power, authority, and who would not be paralyzed by fear. Even Albert Einstein (2007: 177), writing in the British newspaper *the Guardian* in August 1929, noted how Zionism and "…the establishment of a National Home for the Jewish people in Palestine would raise the status and dignity of" Jews everywhere. This enthusiasm was shared by many, including political and revisionist Zionists who were less willing to cooperate with the local populations and found pride in resorting to violence (Baron, 2009a). The generalized lesson across Zionist thought was closely aligned with searching for a secular and physical basis for Jewish pride to be realized when a Jew could work the land, learn to shoot, and become a member of the community of nations. This is a powerful story. That parts of it still carry resonance is not a criticism of Jewish political culture, but rather a commentary about our world as none of this would be meaningful if there was no context in which it made sense and could be valorized. It is, thus, unsurprising that some of the more insightful Jewish critics of Zionism, such as Albert Einstein (2007), Hannah Arendt (2007), and Simon Rawidowicz (1986), all critiqued how (political) Zionism was valued above other options, even while finding something positive in some aspects of the Zionist project. As Einstein (2007) makes clear in his various writings on the subject, the cultural regeneration of the Jewish people was important and pride could be found in the achievements of the early Zionists in Palestine.

[6] In one interview I conducted, this example came up in conversation with the interviewee arguing that it is not accurate and that there are many Jewish athletes. One Jews and sports see, Foer and Tracy (2013).

The role of critique

The act of critique is an important part for how individuals engage with the subject matter of politics and international relations. It is a site of "micro politics" (Solomon and Steele 2017). Yet as scholars, it is difficult to locate such individual conduct as relevant for IR for at least two reasons. The first is that it is individual conduct and as such is, as Oded Löwenheim (2010; 2014) points out, not abstract and removed from everyday life and is, therefore, outside of IR's traditional subject matter. The second is that as scholars of global politics, we often write about material that we do not experience directly. In other words, normative work in IR is work written from a distance. This distance may or may not be necessary, but more important is to appreciate that critique functions as the means by which many of us (including academics) experience the international, and this is especially the case for Diaspora Jews and their relationship with Israel. There is a theoretical and an empirical component to this point about critique and distance.

In his short book, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, Michael Walzer (1987) takes aim at his critics who argue that moral philosophy is about the pursuit for an objective moral principle. Instead, Walzer (1987: 39) argues that moral criticism is best done by "one of us". His point is not to banish the "dispassionate stranger" or that alternative models of social criticism are impossible, but that it can be erroneous to demand emotional and intellectual detachment. On the contrary, the critic is one of us:

> Perhaps he has traveled and studied abroad, but his appeal is to local or localized principles; if he has picked up new ideas on his travels, he tries to connect them to the local culture, building on his own intimate knowledge; he is not intellectually detached. Nor is he emotionally detached he does not wish the natives well, he seeks the success of their common enterprise (Walzer, 1987: 39).

Ghandi and Orwell are examples of the social critic (I would add Simone de Beauvoir), and so too is Ahad Ha'Am, who argued that without cultural Zionism the Jewish spirit was at risk. What is striking in Walzer's argument is not so much its seeming exclusive nature — he does say that outsiders can become social critics, but only if they can get inside, to "enter imaginatively into local practices and arrangements" (Walzer, 1987: 39) — but the importance of identity and self-awareness are to the practice of moral philosophy and social criticism.

This is a very Jewish argument. Jewish not in the sense of Judaism (the religion) but in the sense of a shared history that is largely remembered as a series of injustices committed against the Jewish people. For centuries, if not close to two millennia, it could be argued that Jews have been the victims of others, and for this reason Jewish political thought has been largely concerned with the experience of victimhood (Walzer, 2006). A consequence of this experience has been a fear of outside criticism, as it has been outsiders who have been the sources of oppression. Internal critics could (presumably) be trusted. However, they could also be viewed as treasonous apostates (Spinoza's excommunication comes to mind), thus complicating the insider/outsider dynamic and suggesting instead that the issue is one of the insiders accepting the legitimacy of the critic in order to be willing to hear the critic's criticisms. Within this social psychology it is unsurprising that Jews would not turn to outsiders for criticism, but would ultimately do so themselves. Politically, and in the Jewish/Zionist context, this argument is most famously articulated by the Russian Jewish Zionist, Leo Pinsker (1821-1891) in his essay *Auto-Emancipation* where he writes that the Jew is "everywhere a guest, and nowhere at home" (Pinsker, 1997 (1882): 183). Pinsker's argument is that the Jews lack self-respect and need to find it themselves, to find within themselves the desire to help themselves, and to do so by becoming a nation.

The internal criticisms of Pinsker and Ahad Ha-Am were powerful precisely because they were made by insiders highlighting our own flaws and offering a self-driven solution. Such criticism contributed to building the conditions in which Jews could feel confident in acting publicly in their own best interests. Past experience of such political activity had not always been positive, such as the case of the Damascus Affair where French Jews went to the help of Jews in Syria, but were then challenged at home for caring more for their kin abroad than for France's imperial ambitions (Cohen, 1996; Frankel, 1997; Leff, 2006). In short, the history of victimhood made it difficult to trust outsiders. Indeed, the experiences of the 20th Century only reaffirmed the lesson that it is hard to trust anybody. The Nazis' anti-Semitic policies, combined with the democratic countries' refusal to allow entry of Jewish refugees was further evidence of the untrustworthiness of others. The genocidal terror of the Nazis was bad enough, but liberal democracies committed their own crimes against the Jews by in-directly assisting the Nazis. For example, the unwillingness of liberal countries to help by opening their doors to Jewish refugees trying to escape the Holocaust, was epitomized in an anecdote of an un-identified Canadian immigration official who said, "None is too many" (Abella and Troper, 2012).

A similar dynamic plays out in debates about Israel to the extent that it can be difficult to trust outsiders who critique Israel because as outsiders they cannot imagine themselves being members of

a historically persecuted people: critics have either not learned the lessons of Jewish victimhood being a warning against sovereign power or, conversely, of the need to gain it. The controversies that erupt when almost any public figure says almost anything about Israel or Palestine and is then verbally attacked by those who disagree is evidence of these historically grounded fears. If there is anything that can be said without controversy in regard to Israel/Palestine, it is that discussions (debates) about Israel and Palestine are all too often a hotbed of antagonism, ad hominem assault, intense emotion, and moral righteousness. The very fact that it has become necessary to point out that criticism of Israel is not anti-Semitic serves to highlight that for some, it is.[7] Moreover, making this point emphasizes the significance of distance in two ways. First, in the sense of distance harming the ability to offer social criticisms, and second, in the sense that geographical distance is unimportant when understanding how Jews experience the politics of Israel and debate about Israel. I have even heard of cases where parents do not want their children to attend particular universities because of the atmosphere on campus vis-à-vis support for Israel or Palestine.

Diaspora Jewry's most direct line to Israel is through critique, as critical friends, staunch supporters, ardent critics, or ambivalent bystanders who are swept up in the whirlwind. It is through critique, that Diaspora Jews generally experience their connection with Israel, although critique about Israel among Diaspora Jewry is rarely thought of in this phenomenological way. Instead, it is viewed more as a consequence of belonging or as a response to the expectations of others. While Diaspora criticism of Israel is largely ineffective in influencing Israeli policy, it is nevertheless exceptionally important for Diaspora Jews for a very simple reason. Criticism is one of the few practices that provides an empirical connection with Israel on a regular basis. The act of debating Israel is to connect with Israel and emphasizes the meaningful authority that Israel offers which is then challenged or defended in the act of critique.

Conclusion

Debate or critique about Israel is often contentious because Israel provides a grounding on which to understand contemporary Diaspora identity, that Israel provides a form of authority

[7] For discussions on this issue see, for example: Anti-Defamation League (2016), Booth and Eglash (2015), Butler (2003), Dann (2015), Kerstein (2012), Sheizaf (2012), Wieseltier (2015).

otherwise absent. To question Israel is to undermine an authoritative grounding of contemporary Diaspora Jewish identity. However, the authority, which is best understood as a particular type of meaning as opposed to a source for obedience, that Israel offers contradicts or is in tension with some of the values that otherwise would inform a Diaspora account of authority in modernity. This contradiction is the aporia that debate about Israel is so often centered around, ranging from crude parochial security-first positions to ones guided by human rights, minority rights, and lessons about freedom that come from being a people taught to never forget that we were once slaves.

Debate about Israel can be understood as being about what sources of meaning best shapes contemporary Jewish political discourse. This was a point that Arendt was clearly aware of. In one of her more prescient and sardonic remarks, Arendt (2007: 391) suggested how Zionism made violence an acceptable feature of politics, writing that "Now Jews believe in fighting at any price and feel that 'going down' is a sensible method of politics." At heart, her challenge is against how contained within Zionist (and subsequent Diaspora/Israel discourse) exist political values that provide the grounding for politics-as-violence. The violence of Zionism poses a formidable challenge to enabling any kind of justice-as-emancipation shaped by the values of equal rights that Zionism was, in some ways, intended to offer.

Moreover, and especially damning for delusions of Zionist independence and Jewish sovereignty in Israel, so long as the underlying violence in Zionism is not addressed, Israeli security policies will be defended (from within) as the reaction of a victim, thereby not fulfilling the goal of full political auto-emancipation. The idea of becoming masters of our own future contained within it the seeds of impossibility by not paying heed to the lessons of Diaspora. Zionism imagined a world of clear borders and national rights, when the Diaspora experience has always inferred something else. Thus, to uncritically accept what Israel does is to dismiss Jewish successes in the Diaspora, to view politics as though it remains in a kind of late 19th Century and early 20th Century time-warp of caricatured realpolitik, and ignore any positive political lessons that can be taken from the experiences of Diaspora — what Boyarin and Boyarin (2002) provocatively refer to as powers of diaspora.

In conclusion, the difficulty, however, is that Israel does provide a form of authority for Jews and for Jewish peoplehood that is impossible to ignore (to do so would be to ignore Jewish biblical history). The challenge is to discover a form of Jewish connectivity with Israel that does not subscribe or is even sympathetic to the kind of macho-Jewish Rambo fantasy, but instead seeks to learn from the lessons and experiences of Diaspora. Israel's meaning as a source of authority needs to be undermined while retaining its importance. This is a debate that, contrary to appearance, is not really

happening. The debate instead is characterized more often by dichotomous positions and ideology. In order to answer the question I started with, "What does Israel provide ideationally for Diaspora Jews that serves as the basis for Diaspora/Israel relations and justifies the importance of Israel for Jewish identity?" it is imperative to appreciate the hermeneutic-phenomenological element of how Israel contributes to Jewish senses of identity, and to seek out in Diaspora life political lessons that are not self-defeating.

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